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Special meeting on the "Aftermath of recent hurricanes: Achieving a risk-informed and resilient 2030 Agenda"

Summary record of the 4th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 24 October 2017, at 10 a.m.

President: Ms. Chatardova ..... (Czechia)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Opening of the special meeting

Statement by the President of the Economic and Social Council

1. **The President** said that over the past six months severe floods had been witnessed in Africa and South Asia, earthquakes in Mexico and devastating hurricanes in the Caribbean and in the United States. For the first time in recorded history, the Caribbean region had been hit by two category five hurricanes in the same season. She wished to express her deepest condolences to the victims and their families, and to extend the solidarity of the international community to all affected peoples and Governments.

2. The disasters had led to the tragic loss of lives, the displacement of people, damage to infrastructure and homes, and disruption to livelihoods in both developed and developing countries. The world had seen how inequalities exacerbated people's exposure to the impact of disaster and how development gains could be erased unless the risk-informed and resilient 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was pursued.

3. Following the hurricanes, the United Nations and the international community had come together to assist affected communities in their efforts for immediate relief. The calls made by the Heads of affected States had been heard at the high-level meeting on Hurricane Irma co-hosted by the President of the General Assembly and the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 18 September 2017. The importance of facilitating access to finance for affected small States had been highlighted at the recently held Annual Meetings of the Boards of Governors of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund.

4. Building on those discussions, the special meeting was intended to explore effective ways to help countries reduce disaster risk and strengthen resilience; prepare for and respond to future disaster events, with the support of risk financing instruments; and achieve a risk-informed and resilient 2030 Agenda.

5. Scientists had been warning the international community to expect more intense and extreme weather events as a result of climate change. All partners — the United Nations, international and regional organizations, civil society, the private sector and the scientific community — needed to come together to assist affected States in recovering from the devastating impact of the recent disasters, and in building resilience for future ones. The international community must help the affected States get back on track towards sustainable development.

Statement by the President of the General Assembly

6. **Mr. Lajčák** (Slovakia), President of the General Assembly, said that the special meeting complemented the high-level meeting on Hurricane Irma, which he had jointly convened with the Secretary-General the previous month. The message from that meeting had been clear: there was a need to build resilient societies, invest in disaster risk reduction and combat the devastation from climate change.

7. The recent disasters had devastated the lives of countless people across the Caribbean and the United States. In Antigua and Barbuda, the damage had been catastrophic. The whole island of Barbuda had been rendered uninhabitable for the first time in centuries. During the general debate of the plenary Assembly, the Prime Minister of Dominica had recounted desolation that was beyond imagination in his country. The cost of damage and recovery was immeasurable. It was already known that more than $60 million was needed to address the immediate urgent needs arising from Hurricanes Irma and Maria alone. The response from the international community must therefore match the magnitude and urgency of the situation. In that context, he wished to make three main points.

8. First, while disasters could not be completely prevented, it was possible to be better prepared for their impacts. The most recent disasters had resulted in loss of life, destruction of property and disruption of livelihoods and economies. Resilience must therefore be increased and risks reduced. The disasters were a reminder that climate change was not just the subject of philosophical debate but a reality lived by millions of people around the world: urgent action must be taken to mitigate its effects. The twenty-third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, to be held the following month, provided an excellent opportunity to reiterate global commitments towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement. At the same time, the international community must make sure that it was on track in implementing the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030. Many countries lacked adequate capacity to respond to the increasingly stronger and more frequent weather systems. More must be done to respond quicker and more coherently, especially to restore basic and emergency services. Sectors such as health, water and sanitation, shelter and food required urgent attention.

9. Second, the impact of the disasters had made clear that vulnerability was an obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Vulnerability came in various forms: climate vulnerability, vulnerability to natural disasters, vulnerability to conflict and instability, and economic vulnerability. The setbacks suffered by affected countries could be significant: large-scale population movements reduced access to essential services and livelihood options, and they increased exposure to violence, poverty and insecurity for both displaced populations and host communities. Those concerns should be reflected in the consultations on the global compact for safe, orderly and regular migration. As limited resources would be diverted to the immediate recovery efforts, the loss of income and productivity would constrain economic activity and growth. Moreover, the cost of long-term recovery and rebuilding dwarfed the financial means of most of the affected countries, which were now forced to seek financial aid just to meet the basic needs of their people: water, shelter and food. They needed assistance from the global community in a spirit of common humanity.

10. Third, the world could use the recovery efforts as an opportunity to "build back better". He was encouraged by the pledge announced by the Prime Minister of Dominica to rebuild and become the world's first climate resistance nation. In Dominica and elsewhere, there may indeed be a chance to redesign settlements, integrate clean energy, build infrastructure and reinforce water and sanitation systems. He encouraged all key stakeholders to support the recovery and rebuilding efforts in all affected countries. Institutions should devise creative solutions that would allow already highly indebted countries to access funding to rebuild with resilience. Partnerships with Governments, the private sector, development partners and international organizations must play a significant role in supporting the recovery efforts. It was through those kinds of partnerships that countries and the United Nations system could be better prepared for, and able to respond to, future catastrophes. The present discussions would have direct impacts on people. Effective action was needed across the United Nations system to support long-term recovery and resilience.

Statement by the Deputy Secretary-General

11. **Ms. Mohammed** (Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations), joining the President in expressing her deepest condolences to the affected people and Governments, said that disasters could instantly erase development gains made over many years, leading to death, displacement, damage, disruption and despair. The international community had a responsibility to support affected countries in becoming more resilient; to strengthen the financial systems of those countries so that they could cope with such large-scale shocks; and to promote a risk-informed approach to reconstruction. The Secretary-General had recently travelled to Antigua and Barbuda and to Dominica in order to show his solidarity and see the damage for himself. He had made a very strong appeal not only for humanitarian aid, but also for new mechanisms for building resilience.

12. She commended the Governments of the Caribbean region for their leadership in preparedness and response. The regional emergency response mechanisms, including through the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, along with the predeployment of United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams across the region and international solidarity, had helped to save lives. Assessments were under way through the post-disaster needs assessment of the United Nations Development Programme and the World Bank, and the damage and loss assessment by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

13. However, more must be done at all levels to manage disaster and climate risk and to prepare for future extreme weather events, which were likely to grow in severity and frequency. Risk-informed sustainable development was an absolute necessity and should inform policies and investment criteria. Risk-informed development also required risk-governance systems that could overcome the policy, institutional and programme siloes in which work on climate change, disaster risk reduction and environment was often pursued. The Sendai Framework provided the tools to address new challenges and opportunities.

14. The devastating impact of severe climate events on vulnerable communities translated into acute needs and high costs. In moving towards recovery, a different approach must be taken by using energy sources that were not reliant on the import of fossil fuels, by constructing homes and businesses away from hazardous coastal areas or ravines, and by ensuring that livelihoods could rebound much faster.

15. She welcomed the vision of Caribbean Governments in moving towards green economies and renewable energy and also applauded the region's citizens in responding to the disasters, noting that every means must be found to support their efforts. Remittances from citizens outside the region were more important than ever before for meeting immediate needs and investing in rebuilding. International efforts needed to be accelerated to reduce the costs of transferring such

payments, which would mean more funds reached the families and communities that needed them the most.

16. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 would require public and private investments that could counteract the adverse effects of climate change and the consequences of rapid urban population growth. Investing in disaster-resilient infrastructure and housing paid off over the long term by reducing economic losses and the loss of life. The power of technology, innovation and partnerships must be harnessed to move towards a green, clean and sustainable energy future.

17. In addition to providing urgent assistance, the international community must also help the region to prepare for a future that was likely to be marked by a higher frequency and intensity of external shocks. As the Secretary-General has stressed, financing must support the longer-term resilience of affected countries that were facing the growing threat of external shocks. Eligibility criteria for concessional financing should be reconsidered so that a country's vulnerability could be taken into account in a more systemic manner. That had been done in the past to support middle-income countries hosting large refugee populations, notably Jordan and Lebanon. In that regard, she wished to highlight the work of the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development, whose 2018 report included an inventory of quick disbursing mechanisms for financing in the aftermath of shocks.

18. The fundamentals of financing were currently not aligned with the needs of a world facing the effects of climate change. Approaches to structuring finance must henceforth be innovative and encourage the of use debt instruments that took into account the vulnerability of countries, in order to provide a reprieve from debt payments in the immediate aftermath of a crisis. There were precedents to using State-contingent debt instruments, for example with built-in catastrophe clauses. More ambitious innovations should also be considered, such as the ECLAC proposal on debt for climate adaptation swaps linked to investment in resilience in Caribbean countries.

19. She urged the Council to encourage the international community to take urgent and concrete actions to assist the affected countries in pursuing a risk-informed approach to implementing the 2030 Agenda. Such actions needed to address the threefold aim of meeting immediate needs, putting into place new concessionary financing arrangements, and designing and implementing a framework for financing resilience for the long term. The Secretary-General looked forward to determined follow-up action by the Council to ensure strong progress on the ground. At the global, regional and local levels, the United Nations system would continue assisting affected countries and territories in their efforts towards recovery and resilience, and would work with its partners to secure financing arrangements that supported climate-resilient investments for the long term.

20. As the Secretary-General had stated time and time again, the 2030 Agenda was humanity's best tool for a future of prosperity, peace and dignity for all. That was an opportunity that could not be wasted. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals universally would require a different approach to the way Governments and societies approached sustainable development, and to the way they anticipated and managed their crises. Partners in the Caribbean and beyond could count on the United Nations as a strong advocate, a committed partner and a catalyser of partnerships and financing. It would work to ensure that all remained on track to deliver on the Goals.

Special address by the Assistant Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community

21. **Mr. Slater** (Assistant Secretary-General of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM)), speaking on behalf of the Secretary-General of CARICOM, said that two back-to-back category five hurricanes, one of them the most powerful ever recorded in the Atlantic, had swept across the Caribbean in September, cutting a swathe of destruction, taking lives, devastating infrastructure and severely damaging the economies of small climate-vulnerable States. Not even in the Caribbean, which was the most natural disaster-prone region in the world, had anything similar been experienced before. Hurricanes Irma and Maria were game changers, with the latter going from a category one to a category five in less than 36 hours. The occurrence of successive category five hurricanes signalled a dangerous change in the intensity and frequency of those climate change related events, and heralded the advent of a new normal. Six CARICOM member States and three associate members had been affected. Thirty-seven people had died and a similar number were missing. The principal economic sectors of tourism and agriculture had been very significantly affected with the resulting loss of livelihoods compounding the anguish of the loss of homes.

22. Hurricane Irma had devastated Barbuda, the British Virgin Islands of Tortola and Jost Van Dyke, Turks and Caicos Islands, and Anguilla, as well as Sint Maarten/Saint Martin and Saint Barthélemy. It had also caused significant damage in the Bahamas and Haiti and had affected Saint Kitts and Nevis. Residents of Barbuda had needed to be evacuated as the island was

uninhabitable after Hurricane Irma had damaged or destroyed more than 90 per cent of its buildings and almost all its infrastructure. Most residents remained in shelters and other accommodation on the main island of Antigua.

23. Hurricane Maria had left massive destruction in Dominica. The destruction was unparalleled. It accounted for 26 of the total deaths and 34 of the missing. Around 90 per cent of the island's buildings were damaged or destroyed and nearly all its vegetation had been blown away, decimating the lush rainforests. Cuba and the Dominican Republic were also impacted by the hurricanes. Full damage assessments in Barbuda and Dominica were still ongoing but initial estimates indicated recovery costs could be more than $1 billion.

24. The depth of the problem faced by the region could be illustrated by the case of Dominica. Decimated by Hurricane Maria, the country had not yet fully recovered from the ravages of tropical storm Erika, which had struck in 2015. The total damage and loss at that time had been estimated at nearly $500 million, equivalent to 90 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) of Dominica according to a damage and impact assessment conducted by the Government of Dominica in collaboration with the World Bank, United Nations and other development partners. Before rehabilitation and reconstruction had been complete from that first event, a second climatic event had now compounded the problems.

25. The events of the last month had emphasized that climate change was not a matter to be debated. For CARICOM it posed an existential threat to the region. According to the World Bank report entitled "Turn down the Heat", the number of severe hurricanes was projected to increase by 40 per cent if global temperatures rose by 2 degrees Celsius and by up to 80 per cent should they rise by 4 degrees Celsius, the more likely scenario based on current trends. When allied to sea-level rise, that would have devastating effects on all small island and low-lying coastal developing States, but particularly those in the Caribbean. The CARICOM countries impacted by the hurricanes were small island developing States and, as such, they had inherent vulnerabilities. The repercussions of such climate-related disasters weighed heavily on their development prospects.

26. Given the increased frequency and intensity of natural disasters, the resulting high levels of reconstruction would require a major injection of additional financing which would exacerbate debt levels, if grant or concessional financing could not be accessed. A facility was needed for readily accessing financing, especially by small and capacity constrained countries. Innovative financing mechanisms must be also found to enable countries to cope with external shocks of such magnitude.

27. Most Caribbean countries were categorized as middle income and ineligible for concessional development financing from multilateral financial institutions and official development assistance, since GDP per capita was the dominant criterion used to measure development. New thinking was therefore needed, leading to new criteria for determining access to concessionary resources which, in the case of small island developing States, should include the concept of vulnerability. Borrowing to rebuild only compounded the debt burden of the region.

28. At the recently held Annual Meetings of the Boards of Governors of the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, both institutions had signalled their willingness to support a temporary change in the role of GDP as the main criterion in determining access to concessional development financing. The officials, however, had stressed that the decision to make that change lay with the board members, particularly the larger shareholders. While CARICOM welcomed the move to a temporary change, a permanent change in the criteria would be required since the effects of climate change would continue for the foreseeable future.

29. If Caribbean countries were to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 they needed urgent access to financing, including for climate change adaptation. While they accepted and agreed on the need for accountability, the process to obtain resources, such as those from the Green Climate Fund, could sometimes be very daunting and time consuming. Time was of the essence in accessing those funds as events such as hurricanes were occurring more frequently. Reconstruction must therefore be climate resilient in time for the next event.

30. Achieving the Sustainable Development Goals required a rethink of the financing required, given the high costs of rebuilding and the need to reallocate resources to sectors devastated by natural disasters. The issue of financing to achieve the Goals was of paramount importance to developing countries, particularly least developed countries and climate vulnerable small States.

31. The Caribbean Community intended to rebuild in a smarter and more resilient way in order to make CARICOM a showcase for recovery and rebuilding resilience. However, it could only do so with international support. In that regard CARICOM, with

the support of the United Nations Development Programme, was convening a high-level donor conference on 21 November in New York to help the region access much needed support. Henceforth the objective must be to ensure a smooth transition from managing the consequences of disasters to risk-informed sustainable development and strengthened resilience for future disaster events.

Interactive panel discussion

32. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*), moderator, asked the Executive Secretary of ECLAC what she had learned about the vulnerability of the Caribbean region from the recent unprecedented hurricanes.

33. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)), panellist, said that the destructive strength of the recent hurricanes was derived from the warmer ocean temperatures associated with climate change. Caribbean countries were particularly vulnerable to climate change because of their small size, their insularity and their high levels of external debt. ECLAC had been working very closely with Caribbean countries, whose average debt-to-GDP ratio was over 70 per cent and, in some countries, even higher. The debt overhang of Jamaica, for example, currently stood at over 124 per cent of its GDP. Accordingly, the country had to use 60 per cent of its income to service its external debt, which left very little fiscal space to do anything else.

34. The fact that Caribbean countries were considered to belong to the middle-income category was another source of their vulnerability. Antigua and Barbuda, for instance, would shortly graduate as an upper middle-income country. She wondered how that status could be explained to its people, whose country had practically disappeared. The criteria for classifying middle-income country status must be changed.

35. Another vulnerability of the Caribbean region was due to the fact that 70 per cent of its population lived in coastal areas only 10 metres above sea level. Given the expected increase in the size and scale of hurricanes, appropriate plans would urgently need to be made.

36. The intensity of droughts in Caribbean countries was another major cause of their vulnerability. Seven Caribbean countries were now among the 36 most water stressed countries in the world.

37. Lastly, Caribbean countries were facing new constraints from the loss of correspondent banking relationships. The international community must realize that it could not continue to squeeze Caribbean countries so hard. The issue of correspondent banking would need to be addressed collectively.

38. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*) asked the Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction how Caribbean countries could be expected to meet the Sustainable Development Goals in the light of their vulnerabilities.

39. **Mr. Glasser** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction), panellist, said that the average annual loss from disasters in Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Dominica and Saint Kitts and Nevis equated to 100 per cent of what they spent each year on health, education and social protection. It was inconceivable that those countries would be able to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals when their existing debt burdens would only be compounded by increasingly powerful cyclones and hurricanes. Disasters were already known to have wiped out GDP for consecutive years in some countries.

40. Some climate scientists believed that two tipping points were now close to being reached or had already been reached: the loss of protective coral reefs because of warming oceans and acidification; and the irreversible melting of the West Antarctic Ice Sheet, which would lead to increased sea level rise in the coming decades. It would be impossible to achieve sustainable development in small island developing States without addressing disaster risk and, fundamentally, without reducing greenhouse gases as the single most urgent disaster-risk treatment.

41. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*) asked how countries facing such disasters could build resilience and build back while also developing their own economies.

42. **Ms. Faieta** (Assistant Secretary-General and United Nations Development Programme Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean), panellist, said that countries affected by disasters needed assistance from multiple actors across the United Nations system. The United Nations Development Programme considered it imperative for its recovery efforts to begin at the same time as humanitarian operations. For that reason it had established recovery teams in cooperation with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Partnerships had also been set up with international and local non-governmental organizations, the private sector, international financial institutions and the leaders of national Governments and local communities.

43. In the private sector, the tourism and agriculture industries had both been key drivers of recovery efforts in Caribbean countries. They had contributed resources to build back better, to promote community resilience and to create employment opportunities. In that context she highlighted the Connecting Business initiative, launched at the World Humanitarian Summit, which provided a mechanism for the private sector to engage with the United Nations system, Governments and civil society for the recovery of local economies. Another initiative which similarly allowed for collaboration with the private sector was the Insurance Development Forum.

44. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*) asked the Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator to share the most recent lessons learned about emergency preparedness and humanitarian response in the aftermath of the hurricanes.

45. **Ms. Mueller** (Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator), panellist, said that the unprecedented hurricanes were a stark reminder of the severe risks to which millions of people continued to be exposed in the face of extreme weather events. As the Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator for OCHA, she was responsible for coordinating early response and also undertaking joint work with development actors in the areas of prevention and mitigation. Such joint work was key to the new way of working.

46. In terms of lessons learned in the Caribbean region, early warning and early action had certainly saved lives: in Cuba 1.9 million people at risk, equating to 17 per cent of the total population, had been evacuated to shelters or host families; and the entire population of Barbuda, namely 1,600 inhabitants, had been evacuated to Antigua in the wake of powerful Hurricane Irma. Such actions had been possible thanks to effective national and regional disaster coordination mechanisms.

47. Effective regional partnerships had also allowed for the timely deployment of emergency experts across the Caribbean region. In collaboration with regional and international partners, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency had deployed over 90 response personnel to carry out search and rescue operations, damage assessments, needs analysis and other emergency relief measures. United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams had also worked closely with the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency on civil and military coordination, information management and the mapping of damage and needs. United Nations agencies, in particular the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund, had pre-positioned emergency stocks across the region. Early on, the Emergency Relief Coordinator had also disbursed $13.5 million from the Central Emergency Response Fund in order to kick start immediate relief efforts, meet acute needs and save lives.

48. New technologies and satellite imagery had been used to estimate immediate infrastructure damage and needs, despite communications systems being down across some of the affected islands. The overall response had been commendable, thanks also to the leadership roles played by national Governments.

49. The earlier availability of disaggregated data would however have been beneficial in better targeting the response. Immediate assessments had focus on infrastructure damage, for example, whereas multisector assessments would have guided decision makers to people's needs and enabled a more prioritized response.

50. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*) asked what the World Bank could do to address the vulnerability of small island developing States stemming from their classification as middle-income countries.

51. **Mr. Ghesquière** (Head of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery of the World Bank Group), panellist, recalled that, following Hurricane Ivan, the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility had been established in 2007 by CARICOM, with support from the World Bank and others, and said that the particular vulnerabilities of small island developing States were already factored into elements of concessional finance.

52. The need to integrate the risk dimension into development programmes early on was now widely recognized. Building resilience and managing risks benefited everyone. In Viet Nam, for example, the Government was encouraging property developers to invest in resilience measures, which then had an impact on the value of land. Such incentives to attract private investment in resilience building were particularly important.

53. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*) asked the Executive Secretary of ECLAC how debt relief and other finance issues should be addressed.

54. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)) said that one effective way to tackle debt relief in the Latin America and Caribbean region was through the ECLAC proposal on debt for

climate adaptation swaps, which it had presented to Governments in the region and to the World Bank. That initiative aimed to reduce the multilateral debt stock held at multilateral institutions, with assistance from the Green Climate Fund, and to establish a Caribbean resilience trust fund for projects related to adaptation to climate change. In addition, debt to private creditors could be addressed through a debt buyback scheme.

55. She suggested that the multilateral component of the total debt in the Caribbean, $2 billion out of the total of approximately $52 billion, could be addressed through a write-off. It was also important to ensure concessional financing to those countries in the region which were categorized as middle-income countries, for example, through the Green Climate Fund, or other creditors via the World Bank.

56. With regard to the suggestion made by the Inter-Agency Task Force on Financing for Development on the use of blended finance and public-private partnerships to help resolve the debt issue, she noted that such partnerships should not be used as a means to privatize public services, or to subsidize profits of the private sector.

57. She also highlighted the need for an adequate mechanism to help financial institutions in the Caribbean to deal with the trend of "de-risking" being adopted by large global banks, whereby business relationships with clients or categories of clients considered high-risk were restricted or terminated. That practice was attractive to Caribbean banks, but had a negative effect on the offshore finance sector, which tended to play an important role in the economic sector of the Caribbean.

58. **Mr. Ghesquière** (Head of the Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery of the World Bank Group) commended the ECLAC initiative of a debt for climate adaptation swap, noting that shareholders needed to be assured that their investments in such initiatives could help to prevent disasters from happening in the future. He highlighted the example of the Seychelles, which had made use of such swaps and reinvested funds towards disaster risk reduction. Such initiatives were highly encouraged.

59. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*) asked what contribution the forthcoming twenty-third session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change could make towards addressing issues such as loss and damage.

60. **Mr. Glasser** (Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction) said that that Conference of the Parties would be critical for addressing adaptation planning, including the issue of the clear link between climate risk and disaster risk.

61. More than 70 per cent of major disasters over the past decades were weather and climate-related, a trend which was increasing in frequency and severity. It was hence important to integrate the Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework into the response to climate change and adaptation planning. It was also important to ensure that discussions in the context of the forum on financing for development follow-up included the idea of risk-informed investment and financing for disaster risk reduction. Those discussions could address a number of mechanisms, including that of "resilience bonds", which could be lucrative sources of financing to help countries reduce disaster risk, even for highly indebted small island States.

62. Lastly, he underscored the need to realize that some countries faced real constraints to reducing disaster risk, citing the examples of Dominica, which had been completely razed and its forests completely destroyed in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, and Palau and other islands of the Pacific which were seeking to relocate entirely as a result of climate change. He emphasized that much could be done to build back better. He cited the example of Barbuda, where only one of three storm shelters had survived the recent storm surges, most likely because it was the only one which had been built to withstand a category five hurricane. While it made sense to build shelters withstanding storms of up to category four in the past, that was no longer the case.

63. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*) asked how to keep hurricanes and resilience at the top of agendas after the immediacy of the events had passed, when there were so many other global events competing for attention.

64. **Ms. Mueller** (Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator) said that the fact that the President of ECOSOC had convened the present meeting was a clear signal that solutions were being worked on. She commended ECLAC for its proposed resilience trust fund and debt swap initiative, and urged the ECLAC representative to present those ideas to the Executive Directors on the board of the World Bank, as that board had decided in 2016 to allocate 28 per cent of World Bank financing to climate-related projects and programmes. It was also necessary to advocate for and invest inter alia in climate-resilient crops, improved land-use planning, ecosystems that prevented soil erosion and promoted green infrastructure, and the safeguarding of development gains.

65. With regard to emergency humanitarian response, she said that preparedness had saved lives. Local responders and coordination mechanisms had been critical for rapid response, and joint needs assessments between humanitarian and development actors were the key to building resilience and climate-smart infrastructure.

66. **Ms. Faieta** (Assistant Secretary-General and United Nations Development Programme Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean) said that one way to maintain the matter of hurricanes and resilience on agendas was through the contribution of Member States. In that context, she urged all to attend the high-level pledging conference that would be convened by CARICOM, with support from the United Nations Development Programme, on 21 November 2017, to address the reconstruction efforts in the aftermath of the hurricanes that had recently hit the Caribbean islands, and the challenges that countries there faced. That event would be an opportunity for partnership between the World Bank, the European Union and the United Nations on the one hand, and ECLAC and the Inter-American Development Bank on the other, and for the presentation of their post-disaster assessments, including in terms of damages and losses. It was also an opportunity to discuss immediate actions to be taken in that context, and hear about contributions to post-disaster efforts from major donors, including the contribution of roofing material from China, and an opportunity to discuss the ECLAC proposal.

67. **Ms. Friedman** (Reporter, *New York Times*) asked the Executive Secretary of ECLAC if she could provide an example of a specific solution that could be delivered in the present year to address islands' vulnerability.

68. **Ms. Bárcena** (Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)) said that the financial backstopping of Caribbean countries was necessary. Aside from the 21 November donors' conference, a key framework to maintain momentum on the matter of islands' vulnerability was the 2030 Agenda. In that context, she drew attention to the voluntary national reviews, noting that Belize had just presented its review, and the Bahamas and Jamaica would be presenting theirs in 2018.

69. It was essential to ensure that the Caribbean region remained high among the priorities for the whole region, including for the larger Latin American countries. In that context, the forum of the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on sustainable development provided a good opportunity. In addition, it was imperative to conclude the damage and loss assessments in the present year.

70. Lastly, although mitigation was important, the international community must address adaption as an utmost priority. She hoped that the subsequent Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change could focus on adaptation for countries like Dominica.

71. **Mr. Webson** (Observer for Antigua and Barbuda), accompanying his presentation with computerized slides, said that Hurricane Irma, which had reached category five in Barbuda in September, with wind speeds higher than 195 mph, had wrought enormous and unprecedented damage there. Indeed, Barbuda had been left completely uninhabitable and uninhabited, as the humanitarian disaster had forcibly displaced the island's entire population — 2,000 people, a third of whom were children and a significant portion elderly — to Antigua, which had also taken in more than 2,000 persons displaced from Dominica. That meant that Antigua had needed to absorb more than 1,000 children into its school system within just a few weeks, and had 17,000 persons in need of shelter. In the aftermath of Hurricane Irma, the Government of Antigua and Barbuda was spending $45,000 a day feeding the displaced climate refugees, which was a substantial amount for a micro-economy.

72. It was imperative for the United Nations to begin to consider the phenomenon of persons internally displaced by climate and climate refugees, a phenomenon that small island developing States had long been warning about, within the context of the definition of refugees.

73. He underscored that damage and destruction to one island by hurricanes or the effects of climate change had a ripple effect on all the islands in the Caribbean, given how integrated their small, fragile economies were, as they engaged in trade, shared trading spaces and partnerships, and encouraged the free movement of people between them. In addition, the impacts of climate events on tourism, which was the backbone of most Caribbean island economies, made those economies all the more vulnerable.

74. He noted that the graduation of Antigua and Barbuda in June to the category of a high middle-income country had made it largely ineligible for concessional financing or official development assistance from major donors, since its per capita revenue was considered to exceed the artificial criteria set for recategorization, which was calculated on the basis of GDP alone, without taking into account other characteristics, such as size, remoteness, insularity and vulnerability to external shocks. The calculation criterion was unfair as his country continued to have a high level of vulnerability

that also impeded its progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

75. In that respect, Antigua and Barbuda reaffirmed the special category of small island developing States as outlined in a range of forums, including the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20) in 2012, the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States in 1994, and reemphasized again in the SIDS Accelerated Modalities of Action (SAMOA) Pathway (Samoa Pathway) in 2014.

76. In the light of the above, the cost of rebuilding Barbuda, estimated at more the $200 million in damage, losses and recovery needs, was too great for his Government alone, or the Caribbean region in general, to shoulder. The 21 November donor conference to help with reconstruction and rebuilding efforts was thus greatly welcome.

77. He noted that in Barbuda, and most Caribbean islands, only approximately 4 per cent of annual national budgets was invested in capital projects. While his country would continue to rely heavily on donor financial support during the post-disaster period, it was also important to consider reshaping the criteria that would help to make his country more sustainable. In that context, his Government would call for mechanisms that were more favourable, including that of concessional financing, grants and the halting or elimination of debt, as the CARICOM region in particular was the most highly indebted region in the world.

78. He underscored the importance of climate resilience, noting that his country would work with the international community to enhance the resilience of his country and region. Lastly, he pledged that Antigua and Barbuda would rebuild itself as the strongest, most resilient and first fully green island.

79. **Ms. Dailey** (Observer for Dominica) said that Hurricane Maria had spared no part of Dominica, leaving major destruction in its wake, including a death toll of 25, with 33 persons still missing, and severe damage to physical infrastructure, leaving several communities cut off from the capital city and other large population centres, the entire national electricity grid damaged, and the entire country without access to potable water. In addition, telecommunications had been down and most national hospital services cancelled.

80. In the immediate aftermath of the hurricane, a number of countries and regional and international organizations had provided critical support with search and rescue, medical evacuation, delivery of food, water and other emergency supplies, and with helicopters to provide assistance to cut-off areas in the first three weeks after the hurricane. During that period, the Government of Dominica had secured supplies from local supermarkets first, then from regional suppliers in Barbados, after which larger shipments of food, water and other supplies had begun to arrive from friendly countries, organizations and individuals regionally and internationally.

81. She drew attention to the immediate and effective response of the United Nations, including through logistical support provided by OCHA, and help from the World Food Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund. In addition, the World Health Organization, the Pan American Health Organization, and the International Organization for Migration had worked with a team from the Netherlands to distribute water produced by a Dutch vessel throughout the affected communities.

82. Now 35 days after the disaster, there were glimmers of hope, as greenery was gradually returning, all roads had been cleared and alternate access was provided where bridges had been destroyed or damaged. Efforts at restoring major utilities had advanced considerably, and major public institutions had been reconnected to the national electricity grid. In the capital city, power had been restored to most businesses and residents. Some businesses had begun to conduct their usual activities, signalling a return to a level of normality.

83. Despite major damage to equipment, the main hospital was functioning and water had been restored to several communities. Some schools had begun classes, and work was ongoing with a number of partners and agencies including the United Nations Children's Fund to ensure access for all students to return to the classroom in subsequent months. Many schools had been damaged, and some continued to serve as hurricane shelters for thousands of families.

84. Her Government called for the international community to take immediate action to help stem the life-threatening trends which continued to affect small island states such as Dominica, and reiterated its pledge that Dominica would be the first climate-resilient island state. The aim was to rebuild the island with both physical and social infrastructure in order to withstand the impact of the worst form of climate-related events, or otherwise restore critical services and livelihoods as quickly as possible. In that regard, her Government was currently developing a framework, with the support of the Small Island Developing States Sustainable Energy

Initiative and other partners, for a wider discussion and consultation inter alia on energy generation and distribution, waste management and converting waste into energy, building a more robust water supply, enhancing the connection of telecommunications, and rebuilding and retrofitting health-care and education facilities. Her Government would enforce new building codes to ensure that storm impacts could be withstood in the future. It was also essential to decentralize emergency supplies.

85. She noted that the impact of climate change and climate events such as Hurricane Maria impeded people's achievement of a decent life, and would no doubt delay progress by Dominica towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Dominica would need the support of friendly Governments and organizations in its own efforts to that end. As the Secretary-General had noted during his visit to the country on 8 October the international community should consider non-traditional means to provide assistance, including direct support and concessional loans to middle-income countries. She called for lending institutions such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the Caribbean Development Bank to look further into innovative financing for Dominica, which could then be replicated in other small island developing States in the region.

86. She called for a review of the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility to ensure that it complemented the Green Climate Fund and could help countries impacted by natural disasters. In that context, processes for the drawdown of funds should be simplified, and, once approved, disbursed within a reasonable timeframe. She also appealed for debt forgiveness from creditors in going forward, and called for opportunities for training in disaster management, response and relief, and in climate change response.

87. **Ms. Navarro** (Observer for Panama) said that her Government had been committed to fulfilling global agreements in the area of disaster risk reduction as a matter of State policy ever since the adoption of the Sendai Framework, in line with the 2030 Agenda. Natural disasters including Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, and the recent earthquake in Mexico and tropical storm Nate in Costa Rica imperilled progress made by the most vulnerable countries in particular towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. Support was therefore needed to assist with countries' recoveries in the wake of natural disasters.

88. In the context of such support, she highlighted her Government's decision, in the aftermath of the earthquake that had struck Haiti in 2010, to build a regional logistical centre for humanitarian assistance. That centre would be operational starting in 2018 and would serve as a logistical platform for providing humanitarian assistance in response to natural disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean. It was also part of her country's shared disaster response responsibility with the rest of the international community towards making the changes the world needed, and an example of her Government's commitment towards development in the region. As the host country of that regional centre, Panama was monitoring developments of climate events in order to provide rapid response in affected countries. For example, in the light of recent natural disasters, Panama had provided a search and rescue team to Sint Maarten/Saint Martin, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Mexico, and transportation and other assistance to Costa Rica in the wake of tropical storm Nate. Panama was also providing financial support towards efforts to rebuild Antigua and Barbuda and the island of Tortola.

89. Those natural disasters made it all the more necessary to pool efforts as regards resilience and addressing risk, towards achieving the 2030 Agenda. The international community should steadfastly build on multilateral efforts in that regard.

90. The Republic of Panama was committed to bolstering actions in that respect, and was continuing to lead initiatives such as its launching of the international centre for reducing emissions from deforestation and soil degradation in developing countries, in the context of the Paris Agreement. It was vital for countries to continue in their climate change preparedness and mitigation efforts, and efforts to rebuild affected countries. In addition, coordination among the various international agreements, such as the 2030 Agenda , the Paris Agreement and the Sendai Framework, should be enhanced so that plans for climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction could be complementary in order to ensure the best possible use of available resources. Lastly, she noted that greater efforts were needed to address the specific vulnerabilities of countries.

91. **Mr. Dewar Viscarra** (Observer for Mexico) said that his Government was heartened by the international cooperation that had been extended to his country in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake that had struck Mexico on 19 September. The recent hurricanes in the Caribbean and the United States and their devastating effects had shown the importance of prevention. In that context, Mexico was carrying out various prevention-focused activities. For example, it had hosted the fifth session of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction in Cancun in May 2017, which had highlighted, inter alia, the important element of risk-

informed investments for the resilience of infrastructure and housing.

92. Prevention efforts by Mexico in the Caribbean included work on a project to strengthen infrastructure for spatial data, which was being implemented with help from the United Nations Committee of Experts on Global Geospatial Information Management, with a view to reducing vulnerabilities. In that context, the Mexican cooperation agency and geographical data and statistics institute had provided assistance through satellite imaging, the training of experts, and technical support. In addition, the national centre for disaster prevention provided training and shared its expertise in the context of the Caribbean Platform of Territorial Information for Disaster Prevention.

93. Mexico was also involved in efforts to reinforce resilience in the Latin America mainland, which was also vulnerable to natural disaster, including through the Mesoamerica Integration and Development Project, and the Mesoamerican Comprehensive Risk Management Network.

94. With regard to the key agreements that had been reached in the area of sustainable development in 2015, including the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement, it was vital to follow up on those processes and mechanisms within the context of the General Assembly, especially with a view to building much more resilient communities and societies.

95. **Mr. Hermida Castillo** (Observer for Nicaragua) said that the increasing intensity and severity of extreme weather events and natural disasters that had been wreaking havoc on so many countries in the Caribbean and elsewhere were evidence of the need for ongoing collective efforts towards a strengthened system for the prevention of and rapid response to natural disasters and climate change.

96. The severe storms that had struck Central America on 5 October had battered Nicaragua with heavy winds and rain, leaving a death toll of 15 Nicaraguans and affecting more than 33,000 persons, in addition to destroying infrastructure and more than 6,000 homes. His Government had provided a coordinated response to those events through an early warning and disaster prevention system which had helped to prevent further human losses. His Government had also made it a priority to provide medical care to affected communities and the most vulnerable, and to ensure that water was made potable, thereby preventing potential water-related illnesses.

97. Since the region of Central America was highly vulnerable to climate change, earthquakes and other natural disasters, countries of the Central American Integration System were pooling efforts together to follow up on actions in the context of the integrated management of natural disaster risk, the prevention of the effects of climate change, environmental conservation and protection, the promotion of family and community participation, private enterprise support and international cooperation for adaptation, mitigation and reconstruction measures.

98. He underscored the fact that while nature had its own rhythms, the current pace of modernization, irresponsible development and unsustainable patterns of consumption and production were direct responsible for climate change.

99. Global resources and cooperation were urgently needed towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals, and the Sendai Framework was a sound basis for the development of resilient cities. Prevention, preparation and capacity-building through international cooperation were pivotal for addressing the unpredictable impact of climate events on development.

100. Nicaragua, which ranked fourth among the countries most vulnerable to climate risk in the long term, according to Germanwatch, could only make consistent progress towards achieving the 2030 Agenda through appropriate international policies and support, as well as through access to financing for development. It was important for all countries to take science-based rapid and responsible action to limit the global average temperature increase to below 1.5 degrees Celsius, in accordance with the Paris Agreement, in order to help reduce the destructive effects of climate change already being observed.

101. A compensation mechanism was needed to address the damage and losses that developing countries were constantly facing, as they suffered the most from the consequences of global warming despite the fact that they emitted the least amount of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.

102. Lastly, he noted that his Government had deposited its document of accession to the Paris Agreement on 23 October.

103. **Mr. Mendoza García** (Observer for Costa Rica) said that tropical storm Nate had recently required the declaration of a state of emergency across most of the country. The tropical storm had caused the loss of at least 14 lives, and damage to infrastructure such as roads was estimated to cost $19.6 million. Some 6,000 people had received assistance following the storm, at an additional cost of $2.4 million, and health and education

centres had been closed for several weeks, with some being used as shelters. The Government was still working to restore drinking water to all affected areas. Humanitarian funds had also been used to repatriate vulnerable Costa Ricans from Puerto Rico in the aftermath of Hurricane Maria.

104. Natural disasters were a real threat to the entire world. The principle of leaving no one behind entailed an international commitment to create resilience to reduce disaster risk; a joint effort to offer relief to those requiring humanitarian relief in times of crisis; and sustainable development assistance during the recovery process. Along the same lines, the status of middle-income countries must be reclassified in a way that enabled their complex challenges to be addressed.

105. **Ms. Rodríguez Camejo** (Observer for Cuba) said that the increasingly frequent onslaught of devastating natural disasters confirmed that climate change was a threat to the survival of humanity and to the sustainable development of peoples. It was therefore crucial to follow up on the implementation of such important instruments as the Sendai Framework, the Samoa Pathway, the Paris Agreement and the 2030 Agenda, based on the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities.

106. Environmental commitments and responsibilities to future generations must be honoured by the international community, particularly by developed countries, and it was imperative to increase international cooperation and the transfer of technologies to developing countries.

107. Disaster risk reduction required major investments, particularly in those countries facing the greatest challenges from climate change. Cuba would continue to prioritize international cooperate in that sphere. The tenth International Congress on Disasters, to be held in Havana in 2018, would provide a good opportunity to promote disaster risk reduction initiatives.

108. Hurricane Irma had recently caused devastating damage in Cuba, whose Government and people continued to make colossal efforts towards recovery with the invaluable support of the United Nations system. However, Cuba would continue to show solidarity by providing necessary assistance to those countries affected by natural disasters. It had shown what could be achieved in the area of disaster risk reduction with few resources and despite being subject to the embargo imposed by the United States of America for over 50 years.

109. **Ms. Carey** (Observer for the Bahamas) said that, on 7 September 2017, the third deadly hurricane in as many years had hit the Bahamas. Irma, with sustained winds of 175 miles per hour. A day earlier, the Bahamas Government had carried out an emergency evacuation exercise from six of the southern islands. All of the islands had suffered from considerable damage to their infrastructure.

110. However, the Government was now working with the private sector to create fully green islands that utilized renewable energies, smart solar technologies and sustainable water purification systems. The recent hurricanes had highlighted the need to enforce and possibly strengthen the existing building codes. Her Government hoped to develop a new model for sustainable communities throughout the Bahamas. She was grateful to international partners for their vital assistance during the painful rebuilding and recovery efforts.

111. **Mr. Cortorreal** (Observer for the Dominican Republic) said that Caribbean countries were under a constant threat from natural disasters. Over the past year the infrastructure of his country had suffered enormous damage from Hurricanes Irma and Maria, requiring the investment of over $500 million in relief operations and reconstruction. However, as other countries had been even more gravely affected, the Dominican Republic had also offered humanitarian and other assistance in a spirit of solidarity.

112. Disaster risk reduction, humanitarian action and climate change adaptation efforts must be all addressed together as fundamental components of the 2030 Agenda. In that regard, he wished to draw attention to the proposal put forward by his President for the creation of a special resilience fund that would provide assistance to the most vulnerable countries repeatedly affected by natural disasters.

113. **Ms. Rosa Suazo** (Honduras) said that Honduras had been affected by the El Niño phenomenon, which had resulted in droughts and other emergencies that had undermined food security.

114. Climate change was a threat that multiplied the vulnerabilities of developing countries. Innovate mechanisms must be established to allow vulnerable middle-income countries such as Honduras access to the necessary sources of financing in order to build resilience and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals. Climate change was a global challenge and a shared responsibility that required international cooperation.

115. **Mr. van den Berg** (Observer for the Netherlands) said that the current discussions were crucial for implementing a risk-informed and resilient 2030

Agenda. Climate change had many implications to consider — the humanitarian dimension, the international peace and security dimension, and the planetary security dimension — and new mechanisms were needed to adjust to the new reality. A Special Envoy for Climate Security could be an important step towards making progress in those three crucial areas.

116. The 2030 Agenda provided tools to ensure that countries were prepared for the next natural disaster, wherever that may be. However, resilience was different depending on the communities involved, and an integrated approach should be used when addressing challenging situations. The 2030 Agenda should be used as a basis for building back better, uniting efforts and ensuring that countries were more resilient and better equipped to deal with changing weather patterns.

117. **Ms. Vent** (United Kingdom), welcoming the strong consensus on building back better and the need for risk-informed sustainable development, wondered whether the panel might elaborate on the role of private insurance in helping countries to manage risks. Her delegation believed that insurance could play a valuable role where countries might not be eligible for official development assistance but remained vulnerable to devastation and disaster.

118. **Ms. Amadeo** (United States of America) said that the devastating effects of recent hurricanes and earthquakes were a reminder that natural disasters knew no borders. Those transnational challenges underscored, more than ever the need for regional solidarity. Across the Caribbean, the United Nations had long-standing relationships and unique partnerships that provided the foundation for collective efforts to respond to the humanitarian needs of all affected communities.

119. The devastating impact of recent hurricanes and earthquakes included the mainland of the United States, the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and the United States Virgin Islands. Many communities remained without power, making it even more difficult for families to rebuild their homes and their lives. Her Government was grateful for the offers of assistance received for the communities stuck by Hurricanes Maria, Harvey and Irma and appreciated those expressions of concern and support for the welfare of its citizens. By working together, it would be possible to move beyond the events of the past weeks, recover and rebuild.

120. Under its Caribbean 2020 strategy, the United States pledged to work with Caribbean countries to improve reliance, emergency response and infrastructure. In responding to the recent hurricanes the United States Government had provided more than $15 million in humanitarian assistance. United States civilian agencies had also provided over $15 million of assistance to Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Dominica, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Sint Maarten/Saint Martin.

121. Regionally and internationally, nations susceptible to natural disasters should collaborate to develop disaster risk and contingency plans that accounted for all likely scenarios. At the same time, they should develop the preparedness and response capabilities to assist vulnerable communities and populations before, during and following an event.

122. The United States Government had a long history of dedicating human and financial resources to build in-country capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters, especially for first responders and disaster managers. It would continue to stand with people when disasters struck or crises emerged, but also looked to others to do their part.

123. As all countries in the Caribbean would continue to be threatened by multiple hazards, it was important to build resilience so that all communities were better able to withstand future crises and disasters. Knowledge, innovation and education could be used to build a culture of safety and resilience. Strategic public and private partnerships could also promote disaster risk reduction capacities at the local level. Working through existing forums at the United Nations represented the best way to focus efforts. Doing so would avoid duplication and ensure that the limited resources of the United Nations were focused on meeting needs on the ground.

124. **Mr. Gilles** (France) said that, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the frequency and intensity of extreme events were expected to change as a result of climate change. From 1970 to 2012, almost 2 million deaths and $2.4 trillion of economic losses were reported globally as a result of droughts, floods, tropical cyclones, storm surges and extreme temperatures. Such telling figures should strengthen the global determination to combat climate change through universal adherence to the 2030 Agenda and the Paris Agreement.

125. The French Government considered action to combat climate change a priority. Accordingly, it had launched the Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems (CREWS) initiative under the Paris Agreement. France also held the chairmanship of the CREWS Steering Committee, which aimed to mobilize $100 million by 2020 in 80 vulnerable countries through direct and indirect contributions.

126. **Mr. Córdova Chabla** (Observer for Ecuador), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, said

that the Group wished to express its heartfelt condolences to the people and countries affected by Hurricanes Irma, Harvey, Maria and Nate, which had resulted in the loss of hundreds of lives, the displacement of thousands and devastating damage to such infrastructure as water services, power and telecommunications. The human and economic losses as a result of other recent natural disasters, such as the earthquakes in Mexico and the mudslides and flooding in Sierra Leone, could also not be overlooked.

127. Those natural disasters emphasized the need for a broader and more people-centred preventive approach to disaster risk, while recognizing that disaster risk practices needed to be multi-hazard and multisectoral, inclusive and accessible in order to be efficient and effective. Recalling the Sendai Framework, he said that disaster-prone developing countries needed particular attention in view of the their higher vulnerability and risk levels, which often greatly exceeded their capacity to respond to and recover from disasters.

128. The devastating effects of climate change were real and sudden. Extreme natural disasters could affect the environment, the economy and society. They could reverse hard-earned developmental gains overnight. The massive humanitarian consequences that followed were even more catastrophic. The Group recognized the importance of humanitarian assistance as part of a comprehensive process of disaster risk management and the promotion of sustainable development.

129. The Group urged the United Nations to lead by example and support the implementation of forecast-based financing mechanisms. Assistance should be provided to countries before disasters struck, based on credible national forecasts. Prevention efforts could also be greatly enhanced by universal access to early warning systems.

130. The Group called upon the international community, in particular developed countries, to provide additional aid and resources to the countries affected by the recent hurricanes and to support their efforts to resume their path towards sustainable development.

131. **Mr. Rattray** (Observer for Jamaica) said that one of the major challenges facing the Caribbean was the need to build resilience to climate-related natural disasters. However, the difficulties in financing resilience-building were exacerbated in countries with adverse debt dynamics. The international community could play a key role by providing greater access to concessionary finance. The limits of GDP as an indicator of economic performance, national development and social progress, were well known. The time had come to address the concerns of small island developing States, many of which were highly indebted middle-income countries.

132. In that regard, there was a role for innovative financial mechanisms such as catastrophe bonds. Risk financing instruments like the Caribbean Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility could also play a part in mitigating the risk from natural disasters. However, it should be noted that, in the case of Jamaica and some other Caribbean countries, the nature of the Facility had limited their ability to obtain payments commensurate with the magnitude of the loss and damage sustained. That was because payouts under such risk transfer schemes were only triggered when catastrophes fell within predetermined parameters such as hurricane wind velocity, rainfall amounts, minimum central pressure and geographical location. If those conditions were not met, payouts were not made.

133. It should be acknowledged that building resilience was not solely related to securing financial resources. There were normative actions that countries could take to reduce their risk, such as strengthening building codes, reforming legislation and developing and implementing procedures for early warning response. Those actions would support and hopefully reduce the need for Governments to perennially borrow to rebuild damaged and destroyed critical infrastructure.

134. In additional to the resources required to meet recovery and reconstruction needs, funds would also be necessary to undertake emergency operations. On too many occasions, bureaucratic and administrative delays inhibited the quick disbursement of the funds required for emergency relief and early recovery operations. As such, there was obviously a need for more fast disbursement mechanisms to provide the liquidity needed during crucial post-disaster periods. His delegation called on the United Nations and the wider international community to make a realistic assessment of the structural challenges facing small island developing States, middle-income countries and those struggling with adverse debt dynamics. The financial mechanisms and strategic approaches in place to address those challenges must be made more effective and relevant to current realities. Challenges emerged when vulnerable countries were confronted with external shocks that threatened the lives and livelihoods of their citizens. While those issues had long been examined by the international community, the responses were, in many instances, inadequate to the magnitude and frequency of the risks to which they were now exposed.

135. Jamaica stood ready to raise risk awareness among its citizens and to promote a global culture that

encouraged the building of disaster resilient communities and nations.

136. **Mr. Avdeev** (Russian Federation) said that the increasing number of natural disasters meant that flexibility was required when choosing how to respond and provide the most effective assistance. The needs of affected States must also be taken into account, for example, as well as such factors as remoteness and the international response from other actors.

137. Russian humanitarian operations following the catastrophic earthquake in Mexico and the destructive impact of Hurricane Irma, which totalled over $3 million, had clearly demonstrated such a flexible approach. Russia had offered Mexico assistance immediately following the earthquake, with its Ministry of Emergency Situations dispatching search and rescue teams. On 27 September the Russian Government had then ordered a plane fly to Acapulco with 35 tons of humanitarian goods, including tents and food.

138. In response to the recent hurricanes, the Russian Federation had decided to significantly increase the amount of its assistance sent by maritime transport. In mid-November, 1,133 tons of humanitarian goods would arrive in Mariel, Cuba. Similar initiatives were being discussed by the Government to provide aid to Dominica. Medicine and medical devices capable of helping some 48,000 people would also shortly be delivered to Havana. Financial humanitarian aid was also being finalized for Dominica and Antigua and Barbuda.

139. It was crucial not only to provide international assistance to tackle the consequences of natural disasters, but also to help create the conditions in which States could effectively fend for themselves against them in the future, as provided for in the Sendai Framework. In that regard, from 24 September to 14 October, Russian instructors had taught a practical course on search and rescue operations in destroyed buildings at the Russian-Cuban Fire and Rescue Training Centre in Havana. Specialists from Cuba, Haiti, El Salvador and Venezuela had attended the course, which had been a useful contribution to overall international efforts to provide countries in the region with training on disaster management. Russian specialists would continue to hold various courses in Cuba and Haiti. There were also plans to upgrade the Russian-Cuban Training Centre.

140. The experience gained from responding to the recent hurricanes and earthquakes once again highlighted the importance of sharing the latest information among crisis management centres, which now existed in almost all countries. That was particularly important in the first days and hours following a natural disaster, in order to assess the impact, determine the most urgent needs and design coordinated proposals for assistance. Unfortunately, it was very rare for crisis centres in affected States to cooperate directly with States providing assistance, and information about natural disasters was largely exchanged through diplomatic channels, which could result in delays, misunderstandings and even the loss of key information.

141. The establishment of a global network of crisis management systems, an initiative proposed by the Russian Federation, would remedy that problem. The advantage of the initiative was that it would not require significant financial resources and would entail only a few changes to the working methods of existing structures combined with additional training of staff. He invited crisis management centres of other States to join the initiative. Creating a global network of crisis management centres would significantly improve the quality and efficiency of decisions on international assistance, and thus their impact.

142. **Ms. Mejía Vélez** (Colombia) said that Caribbean countries must work together to become stronger in addressing the challenges posed by natural disasters. However, current efforts were clearly inadequate and more awareness was needed of the consequences of inaction. The classification of countries based on GDP must be changed in order for them to secure access to multilateral funds. Middle-income countries had been calling for a multidimensional approach to development for years. In that regard, she particularly welcomed the progress that had been made on defining new parameters for measuring development and the ECLAC proposal for a fund to alleviate multilateral debt in Caribbean countries.

143. **Mr. Ramírez Carreño** (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela) said that his country had been one of the first to offer its assistance to countries of the affected Caribbean region in the wake of the recent hurricanes. It was paradoxical however that those States historically most responsible for greenhouse gas emissions had not responded sufficiently to assist those most affected by natural disasters. The response to calls in Haiti had been particularly underwhelming. Specialized agencies of the United Nations must therefore increase their efforts to assist in the reconstruction efforts and additional measures such as debt alleviation and concessionary finance would be increasingly important. As an example of a successful solidarity initiative he drew attention to Petrocaribe, an alliance launched in 2005 which had been beneficial to many Caribbean States.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.